

REBUILDING THE SOUL:
CHURCHES AND RELIGION IN BAVARIA, 1945-1960

Joel Davis

Dr. Jonathan Sperber, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

After twelve years of Nazi rule and with Germany in total ruin, the Catholic and Protestant churches sought to re-Christianize German society. Bringing Germans back to Christ was seen as the only way to make good on the Nazi past and ward off any future slips into political radicalism of either the left or right. These efforts centered on three core topics: regular worship attendance, confessional schooling for children, and an “ordained” marital life. This dissertation examines the theoretical foundations and practical applications of these efforts as well as their reception by the laity. It is the first to proceed on such a course of study across specifically cross-confessional contexts. The research for this dissertation was conducted in Bavarian church archives. Results indicate that confessional tension was far more widespread than many have believed. Furthermore, mass consumerism helped create an ethos of individualism that severely undermined the shared experiences of traditional Christian communities and the moral authority of the churches. This work helps define the specific place of churches and religion in the post-1945 world. It examines how the culture of consumption that arose after World War II affected existing religious customs and mores. Finally, it shows the possibilities and shortcomings of ecumenicalism.